

THE EUGENICS REVIEW

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"Eugenics is the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally."

NOTES OF THE QUARTER

LESS than two years ago the British Medical Association appointed a special committee to report on "the various medical problems presented by mental deficiency, more especially with regard to methods which have been suggested to reduce its incidence and to the facilities for medical education in this subject." That a committee so large—21—should have produced a full report* on so difficult a subject in so short a time is highly creditable; and our excuse for failing to do more than mention it is that it was published only a few days before our going to press. It will be fully noticed in the next number of the REVIEW.

Meanwhile, the first thing that will strike the critical reader is that the B.M.A. has slipped into the error more common to Cabinets, that of putting a thorny and controversial subject before a number of persons who have already made up their minds on the principal issues involved. The committee consisted of two parts—fellows of this *Society* or others of like mind, on the one hand, and men or women, on the other, who had declared their opposition to the

chief question implicitly at issue, sterilization. The latter were apparently in the majority.

It is much to the credit of the committee, therefore, that in spite of this fundamental handicap, it has succeeded in producing any report at all; and it is scarcely surprising that, whenever a crucial point arises, the report takes refuge in a series of paragraphs which so qualify each other as to leave the position practically what it was before. The committee admits, for instance, that amentia is frequently hereditary, but it is so cautious as to *how* frequently that the lay reader is left to decide for himself whether the proportion is 5 per cent. or 80 per cent.! The discussion of this aspect is, nevertheless, one of the best parts of the report.

The report also says that there is no evidence that aments are more fertile than normal—which is remarkable, and can only mean that the committee did not review most of the relevant evidence, and slipped into the old error of judging the fertility of aments from the small and highly selected group already under control.

While the sterilization of certifiable aments is not considered likely to reduce their numbers considerably in the near future—a point on which much could be said—it is recognized as desirable in certain cases, while the sections dealing with the marriage and 'socialization' of aments, though as equivocal as the others, contain many hints that sterilization would be their proper complement. Not only that, but the report explicitly says that attention has been too much concentrated upon aments and the 'social problem group,' and that the value of sterilization in reducing other heritable diseases has been forgotten.

Such a verdict from a tribunal so constituted may be considered, on the whole, a remarkable endorsement of the *Society's*

* *British Medical Journal*, June 24.

campaign for sterilization and, generally, of the eugenic position.

Immediately following the report, Sir Leslie Scott and Miss Evelyn Fox wrote to *The Times* (June 27th), on behalf of the Central Association for Mental Welfare, in terms which indicate that little or nothing now divides that body from this *Society*—which, indeed, might very well have been responsible for the whole letter, with the possible exception of the final paragraph. This affirms the need for further research before introducing sterilization, and welcomes the Government committee which has recently been appointed by Sir E. Hilton Young. The *Eugenics Society* equally welcomes the committee, especially as it includes Dr. R. A. Fisher, who will ensure that there will be no loose thinking on either the genetics of amentia or on the rate of elimination. But—let us repeat it again, since our position is still sometimes misconstrued—we consider that there is already ample evidence to justify voluntary sterilization. We do not oppose further research, as has sometimes been said—in spite of the fact that we were the first to press for and to further it materially—but we do say that it is now sufficiently advanced to accompany, rather than to precede, the moderate practice of permissive sterilization. How is it possible, in any case, to add to the large existing body of data available without extending the practice, on a small scale at least, to this country?



Nothing more can be said of the new committee at the moment, except that though somewhat differently constituted it is nevertheless composed of experts and of those with declared opposing views.* We would far rather have had a committee composed of entirely impartial persons,

* The members of the committee are :

Mr. L. G. Brock	Dr. A. F. Tredgold,
(Chairman).	F.R.S.E.
Mr. Wilfred Trotter,	Miss Ruth Darwin.
F.R.S.	Dr. E. W. Adams.
Dr. R. A. Fisher, F.R.S.	Dr. E. O. Lewis.
	Dr. R. H. Crowley.

ignorant of and uninterested in the issues involved—like the recent body, a governmental precedent, appointed to investigate sweepstakes and gambling.

We, in this country, have a system of law which is the envy of the world ; and its very basis is that every case shall be tried by a judge and jury whose impartiality is assured. Is it too much to ask that an issue as important as sterilization, involving hundreds of thousands of human beings and the very life of the nation itself, should be given that full and impartial hearing which our social and legal traditions accord to every petty litigant, every man accused of crime?—The *Eugenics Society* does not fear to put its case before such a tribunal.

But surely the expert or the declared protagonist should never be judge or jury !



Enclosed with this REVIEW is a reprint of a leading article in the *Spectator* of July 2nd. It is not intended for Fellows and Members of this *Society*, but is meant, rather, for them to give to friends who are sceptical about sterilization, or who have been bemused by the report of the B.M.A. Committee.



There has also been this *Society's* Sterilization Conference, which is briefly reported on page 133, and the proceedings of which have been published separately. Wing-Commander James is especially to be congratulated on the energy with which he has promoted the question in Parliament, and on the success he has achieved. But perhaps the most important fact which emerged from the Conference was the *unfairness* of the present dubious legal position—the quality of “one law for the rich, and another for the poor.” There can be very few on the staff or executive of this *Society* who have not assisted, from time to time, to provide for the sterilization of various persons—it is one of the many personal problems which are brought to us. Whenever the patient has had even a moderate income, it has been perfectly easy

to secure the operation by a good surgeon and in proper conditions. But whenever he or she has been poor enough to be normally dependent on the public hospitals, the difficulties have been almost insuperable. On one occasion, as readers may remember, it was necessary to raise a fund privately to finance the operation on a man who, himself deformed, already had one child similarly afflicted.

The social injustice of this state of affairs is what will probably strike most people; but the racial aspect is equally important. The rich and well-to-do are, to begin with, relatively unimportant by reason of their small numbers; secondly, a mentally or physically defective child in such circumstances is well cared for and is but little drag on the rest of the family; thirdly, and most important, marriages—or, at any rate, fertile marriages—of defectives among the 'upper' classes are already so rare as to be entirely negligible. That is probably one of the main reasons why genetic defect is now more frequent in the very poorest class—it has, in effect, been sterilized out of the others.



Since there is still some confusion of thought as to the types which are fitted for sterilization, it would be well to repeat that this *Society* does not include rapists, sexual perverts, or criminals among them. Sterilization cannot possibly have any effect upon the behaviour of such persons, whose proper treatment is effective control.



The Social Survey of Liverpool is recognized as one of the very best examples of modern scientific sociology; and the incorporation of eugenic studies as an integral part of it is likely to yield sounder results than those confined to merely a few social or racial aspects. A first instalment is printed here on page 97; and it would be difficult to exaggerate the scientific importance of Mr. Caradog Jones's discovery of the relationship between amentia and fertility. To the commonplace that aments

and their kin are more fertile than the normal, he adds the significant discovery that fertility is precisely correlated with amentia and the 'social problem' group of qualities, rising steadily with the deficiency of the family and the number of aments produced. This not merely confirms, by implication, the constitutional quality of deficiency and inefficiency, but also indicates that their association with fertility is not adventitious, but rather a deeply rooted character of the stock.



Owing to the ever-increasing demands on our space, we regret that it has not proved possible to report the Conference on Family Endowment which was held at the London School of Economics last April. Only one address, however, brought the subject into relationship with eugenics, that of Dr. Fisher, and his views are well represented in the article printed here on page 87. Together with Mr. Armstrong's, his article provides a cogent illustration of how this important social development may be adapted to serve the needs of eugenics—as well as how it is likely to be developed on dysgenic lines unless eugenists make their influence felt *within* the ranks of the family endowment movement. The REVIEW would welcome correspondence arising out of these two articles, especially constructive criticisms and further developments of the general scheme.

The subject deserves attention in being almost the only practicable scheme of positive eugenics. Its one serious rival at the moment is the attractive one actually put into practice by M. Dachert at his eugenic garden city near Strasbourg—an example which, it is to be hoped, may be followed in England before long. As Mr. Armstrong says, writing in the *Charity Organization Quarterly* (April 1932), "a tenth part of what we are now spending in a single week on national insurance would be ample provision for the founding of one such colony in England. Once founded it could look after itself. Are there in Britain no municipal authorities—or private individuals

with means—who will dare to dispute with France the honour of doing this pioneer work? ”*

Though rivals, these two schemes of positive eugenics are in no sense antagonistic; and it is possible to visualize some form of combination on the small scale which would be necessary as an experiment and example. We lay stress on them, since negative eugenics, and particularly sterilization, bulk more largely—inevitably—in this REVIEW and in general eugenic discussions than is desirable. They are unattractive and uninspiring themes, for the mere prevention of decay is always less interesting than the pursuit of an ideal, and the dust of conflict in petty political issues obscures the fact that this *Society* exists, and at heart knows it, not merely to prevent the degradation of the English race, but to find the way to develop from it some far finer and happier type of human being than has ever yet existed—as far removed from present-day humanity as that is from the ape.

That is our misty goal, and the eugenicist need feel no uneasiness in admitting that he cannot grasp or define it. It is enough that he can see that one small step forward which is sufficient for the practical purpose of developing a slightly finer, sounder, saner man or woman than most of us are, and of chiselling out the methods to be adopted.



Nudism, sun-bathing, and related sub-

* Mr. Armstrong, who can be addressed c/o the Editor, asks us to say that he would be glad to hear from others interested in the project.

jects have no connection whatever with eugenics—though certain people with vague ideas often seem to associate them—except in so far as they have a bearing on sex education. Our attention has been called, however, to a recent circular of the Sun Bathing Society which contains, among other questionable statements, the assertion that more sun bathing, or “active air bathing,” would “reduce the number of the mentally defective.” So absurd an example of the hysterical propaganda which characterizes so many modern health movements, would not, by itself, be worth mention if it were not accompanied by a reprint of a letter to *The Times*. This letter is—with one exception—a sober and dignified appeal by a number of eminent persons on behalf of sun bathing; but the circular is so arranged as to give the impression to the ordinary reader that the signatories believe that a surplus of clothes is the cause of amentia, with more “air bathing” as the appropriate cure!



A small, but significant, sign of the changing attitude towards eugenics was provided the other day by Convocation, which invited Lord Dawson of Penn, Mr. M. S. Pease, and Mr. E. J. Lidbetter to give evidence before the Special Committee on Church and Marriage. Lord Dawson dealt with birth control, and the others with pure eugenics.

We hope the Bishops will pardon us for saying that their predecessors not so very long ago would have placed these gentlemen, not in the witness-box, but the dock!

